

A Man Known to Few, And a Mystery to Many

Richard Perez-Pena

April 4, 1996

As a mathematics scholar at several prestigious universities and later as a near-hermit living more than 20 years in a hand-built shack in the wilds of the Continental Divide, Theodore John Kaczynski, the man the authorities believe is the Unabomber, showed himself to be both brilliant and elusive.

Mr. Kaczynski, who had graduated from Harvard University at 20, favorably impressed his professors as a graduate student at the University of Michigan in the mid-1960's but left barely a trace in the minds of his fellow students.

Thirty years later, in tiny Lincoln, Mont., he was known only as a polite but evasive and ill-kempt recluse who lived outside the town, a frequent user of the public library who lived without plumbing or electricity and grew his own food.

"As far as pursuing a conversation, he wouldn't do it," said Rhoda Burke, who worked at the D & D Foodtown store in Lincoln. "He was pretty much a loner. He would only come into town once or twice a month."

Residents there said Mr. Kaczynski went everywhere on foot or on an old bicycle equipped with snow chains that he had made himself. He never drove a car or a truck, and only rarely accepted a ride in one. A few times a month, he would ride to town, wash his clothes in a laundromat, buy as much food as would fit in his backpack, and ride back out.

What arc Mr. Kaczynski traced from a math prodigy growing up in a quiet, working-class suburb of Chicago remains a mystery. But the picture of his life that began to emerge yesterday is remarkably like the profile of the Unabomber that Federal agents had compiled.

Mr. Kaczynski had, as they had guessed, a background in the academic world and links to the Chicago area and to Northern California, where he taught math briefly at the University of California at Berkeley. And, perhaps most telling, his whole existence evinced the profound alienation from modern life and machinery that was at the core of the Unabomber's published manifesto.

But if, in fact, he is the bomber, he took great care to draw no attention to himself. Many of the Unabomber's explosive packages were sent through the mail, but Eileen Lundberg, who with her husband, Dick, ran Mr. Kaczynski's rural mail route for several years, said, "He never had any mail going out, not that we can remember."

Mr. Kaczynski built his home, a 12-by-10-foot shack in the early 1970's, and, according to those who lived nearby, had lived there ever since. In this, at least, investigators may have been wrong; they had guessed that the Unabomber lived in northern California.

One of the few people who saw Mr. Kaczynski regularly was Lee Mason, who, at a distance of a quarter mile, was his closest neighbor for more than 20 years.

"He doesn't speak in complete sentences," Mr. Mason said. "He would say words, and the words didn't always make a lot of sense. One of the words he said to me one day was, 'I want to go home.' He came to my house and just said, 'I want to go home,' then turned around and left. He had a small garden in the summertime. He chopped wood."

In a region that has many seasonal residents and has attracted people as removed from the mainstream as back-to-the-land hippies and right-wing militias, Mr. Kaczynski's reserve, self-sufficiency, long hair and beard drew little notice. Some people who encountered him regularly did not know his last name.

"This is the kind of town that no one would bother you," said Todd Fisher, publisher of The Blackfoot Valley Dispatch in Lincoln. "Even when there was six feet of snow he was walking or riding a bike. I always saw him alone, always. I would say hi and he would return the hi and that was it."

Unlike others who lived off the land, he did not hunt, and Ms. Burke, the food store employee, said she thought he was a vegetarian.

While in town, Mr. Kaczynski would often buy a newspaper and stop at the library. Beverly Coleman, who was a volunteer at the library, said he checked out books in several languages, and always returned them on time.

Mr. Kaczynski's sharp turn away from society occurred after he spent several years in the 1960's on two college campuses – in Ann Arbor, Mich., and in Berkeley – that were seedbeds of a counterculture that reacted profoundly against not only the war in Vietnam, but against materialism and many of society's standards as well. It is unclear whether Mr. Kaczynski was a part of that movement.

It was at Michigan in the early '60s that Students for a Democratic Society was founded, and the first "teach-ins" against the war were held at Michigan in 1965, while Mr. Kaczynski was there.

From Michigan, where he received a doctorate, Mr. Kaczynski went to Berkeley, home of the "free speech" movement a few years before and another hotbed of anti-war activism. He taught math there for two years.

Contemporaries of Mr. Kaczynski in Michigan's graduate program in math – a program they said had about 250 students at a time – had no memory of him, a fact that struck one former participant as remarkable.

"I was really gregarious," said one of those, Michael D. Fried. "I mean I really knew a lot of people and I didn't know him. He must have really hidden if I didn't know him."

Another contemporary in the program, George Kozlowski, said: "I feel like I've never even heard his name before, which is hard to believe."

But George Piranian, a professor emeritus of mathematics, recalled him clearly. "He was a very able, very serious student and he solved a very difficult problem in his thesis," he said. "Those who knew him had a very high respect for him."

Professor Piranian said that Mr. Kaczynski had written his thesis in the abstract branch of mathematics known as modern complex analysis.

Peter L. Duren, a professor of mathematics at the University of Michigan who once taught Mr. Kaczynski, expressed astonishment at the arrest. "I am surprised, definitely – that's not the person I knew," Professor Duren said. "He was nonviolent, he was just very much wrapped up in his mathematical research – I wasn't aware he had any social concerns."

He said Mr. Kaczynski was one of the best students in the class, titled "real analysis." "What made him a good student was he had a very independent mind," the professor said. "He wasn't content to play back what other people told him."

At Michigan, too, Mr. Kaczynski apparently kept to himself. "I don't think he had very close personal relationships, at least with people in the mathematics department," Professor Duren said.

John Addison, who was chairman of the math department at Berkeley at the time, said he did not recall Mr. Kaczynski but had heard he resigned because "he wanted to change the direction of his work and do something of more social relevance."

Mr. Kaczynski was born May 22, 1942, and grew up in Evergreen Park, Ill., in a three-bedroom Cape Cod house flanked by elm trees.

Donald Sobbe of Evergreen Park, who said he met Mr. Kaczynski when they were in sixth grade at Central School, recalled the suspect as a "likable guy" who played trombone in the school band and once dreamed of joining the space program and flying rockets.

At the end of their sophomore year in high school, Mr. Kaczynski, at age 16, won a scholarship to Harvard, quite a feat for Evergreen Park, where only about a third of the class went on to college back then.

"This guy was really up there in the genius category," Mr. Sobbe said. "I don't think anyone realized it until high school."

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The New York Times, April 4, 1996, Section B, Page 12.
<nytimes.com/1996/04/04/us/on-the-unabomber-s-track-the-suspect-a-man-known-to-few-and-a-mystery-to-many.html>

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